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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses both the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted education programs and the lack of culturally diverse gifted education teachers in rural West Virginia. The 1988 National Education Longitudinal Study found disproportionate representation of minority group students in gifted education. In West Virginia, only 3 Black teachers have been certified since 1976 to teach gifted students, as opposed to approximately 700 Caucasian teachers. To further explore this trend, 200 gifted teachers were surveyed in West Virginia concerning the ethnicity of themselves and their students. West Virginia gifted students are identified by an IQ score of 130 or above, which represents 2 percent of the student population. However, only 37 of the state's 12,503 Black students were identified as gifted, accounting for only two-thirds of 1 percent of Black students. While Blacks were represented among counselors, supervisors, principals, and classroom teachers, there were no Black school psychologists responsible for administering and interpreting IQ tests. One approach to increasing the number of Black students and other minority groups in gifted programs involves developing community, teacher, and parent awareness programs that help identify gifted students. Equally important is the training of minority group teachers for gifted education. Includes tables of demographic characteristics of gifted teachers and students in West Virginia. (LP)

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Cultural Diversity Among Gifted Students and Their Teachers in Rural West Virginia

By the end of this century, minority students will fill two of every five classroom seats. Yet with these increasing numbers, minority students are underrepresented in the ranks of gifted education programs. Economically disadvantaged and minority students, having access to fewer advanced educational opportunities, often go unnoticed (Ross, 1993). Given the nation's changing demographics, rural school systems can ill afford ignoring cultural diversity among the ranks of both students and educators.

Culturally different children, including minority and economically disadvantaged students are particularly neglected in programs for gifted (Ross, 1993). According to the 1988 National Education Longitudinal Study, 8.8% of all eighth grade public school students participated in gifted and talented programs. However, disproportionate representation existed between racial and ethnic groups. For example, while 17.6% of Asian and 9.0 % of white, non-Hispanic students participated, only 7.9 percent of black, 6.7% of Hispanic, and 2.1% of native American students were involved in gifted education.

Ignorance and misunderstanding about giftedness and cultural diversity contribute to the dilemma of underrepresentation of minorities. Typically programs for disadvantaged and minority children focus on solving the problems they bring to school, rather than empowering them to develop their strengths (Ross, 1993).

Ideally teachers must be free of prejudice or stereotypes in order to accept the child as a person who is potentially capable of high achievement (Baldwin, 1987). Effective teachers of minority students understand and respect cultural diversity and have a high degree of tolerance for behavioral characteristics which do not fit usual conceptions of giftedness.

The race and background of America's teachers influence children's views

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of power and authority. Haberman (1989) stated, "These messages influence children's attitudes toward school, their academic accomplishments, and their views of their own and others' intrinsic worth. The views they form in school about justice and fairness also influence their future citizenship."

While culturally diverse students are increasing in America's classrooms, fewer culturally diverse individuals are entering the teaching profession. Sadly, Baldwin (1987) reported only 10% of teachers were members of minority groups, compared to 20% of school aged children. While in the past as much as 18% of the U.S. teaching force was made up of African American teachers, it is estimated that the proportion will soon fall to less than 5% (Haberman, 1989). Even more alarming, while universities confer only 100,00 new bachelor's degrees a year on minority students, fewer than 10% of these are in education.

1976, the state Department of Education of West Virginia, put into effect a mandate to provide gifted students the same rights to a free and appropriate education, with the same procedural safeguards as were given the handicapped. Since that time, in all three institutions of the state with training programs for certification in gifted education, only three black teachers have been certified to teach the gifted as opposed to approximately 700 caucasion teachers. This represents, at the very least, a severe lack of positive role models for the black gifted students in West Virginia.

Do these comparisons still hold true in West Virginia, a totally rural state? Moreover, what is the ethnic diversity of both rural gifted education teachers and students? The present investigation examined the demographic makeup of students and teachers throughout rural West Virginia gifted education programs.

Procedure

The superintendents of West Virginia's 55 counties were asked to provide names and school addresses of their gifted staff. As a result, 200 teachers of gifted students were mailed a survey and asked to provide information relative to the ethnicity of themselves and their students. Other data were provided by the West Virginia Department of Education and the West Virginia Equal Opportunity Employment Commission.

Results

West Virginia employs a single method of identifying gifted students: an

IQ score of 130 or above. Given the normal curve, this represents 2% of the population. When looking at the distribution of the student population statewide, the 2% figure should hold true across ethnic backgrounds. However, Table 1 indicates that only two thirds of one percent of black students have been identified in West Virginia's public schools. In terms of raw data, Table 2 shows that only 37 black students, of the state's 12,503 black students have been identified. Given the 2% ratio, a minimum 250 black students should have been identified but were overlooked! Table 3 speaks to the general staff who provide direct services within the identification procedure. While blacks represent between 2.0 and 2.6% of the counselors, supervisors, principals and classroom teachers, there are no black school psychologists (those responsible for administering and interpreting IQ tests for all students).

Conclusions

There are no perfect solutions to the problem of under identification of black children in gifted programs. Various ways to approach the problem have included culture-fair tests, examiner ethnicity, non-traditional measures of intelligence and proportional representation. The research effect of these has not been conclusive, however.

One approach receiving little attention, concerns recruitment through community, teacher, and parent awareness program (Kitano & Kirby,1986). Coordinators of gifted programs can train community liaison persons to recognize referral characteristics and inform parents of available programs. They can develop and distribute brochures, encourage preschool screening clinics in community service centers as well as mount radio, television and newspaper campaigns. Inservice personnel for all public school personnel regarding characteristics can also be provided. Training more African-American teachers of gifted can be a vital way to affect community awareness.

Given the nation's changing demographics, it can no longer afford to ignore diversity. More minority leaders are needed to serve as role models (Baldwin, 1987). It is even more apparent today that in the future we shall have to depend upon creatively gifted members of disadvantaged and minority cultures for most of our creatitive achievements (Torrance, 1969).

TABLE 1

Certified Teachers of Gifted and Identified Gifted Students in the state of West Virginia. Savage/Russell (1992)

	Male	Female	White	Black	Asian	Hisp.	Indian
Teacher	14	181	193	1	0	0	2
Percent	10%	90%	.985%	.005%	0%	0%	.01%
Student	2959	2717	5506	37	118	8	7
Percent	52%	48%	.9689%	.0067%	.0215%	.0014%	.0012%

TABLE 2

Total ethnic background of students. (West Virginia State Department of Education, 1991)

Race	Total	Percent	Percent Identified	#Identified Projected # Identified
White	253,603	.945%	.021	5236/5072
Black	12,503	.038%	.003	37/250
Asian	1,202	.003%	.098	118/24
Hispanic	568	.014%	.004	8/11
Indian	145	.0005%	.048	7/3

* While African-American Students represent nearly 4% (.038) of West Virginia's general student population, they represent less than 7/10 of 1% (.0068) of all identified gifted students.

TABLE 3

Staffing figures for public education in the state of West Virginia. (Equal Opportunity Employment Commission, 1991)

	Male	Female	White	Black	Asian	Hisp.	Indian
School Psych.	37	55	90	0	1	1	0
Percent	40%	59%	98%	0%	1%	1%	0%
Guidance Counselor	289	609	873	24	1	0	0
Percent	32%	68%	97%	.026%	.004%	0%	0%
Consultant/ Supervisor	38	78	114	2	0	0	0
Percent	32%	68%	98%	2%	0%	0%	0%
Principals	1199	514	1669	43	0	1	0
Percent	70%	30%	.974%	.025%	0%	.0005%	0%
Classroom Teachers	6625	8991	15221	353	12	24	6
Percent	42%	58%	.974%	.022%	.0007%	.0014%	.0003%

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